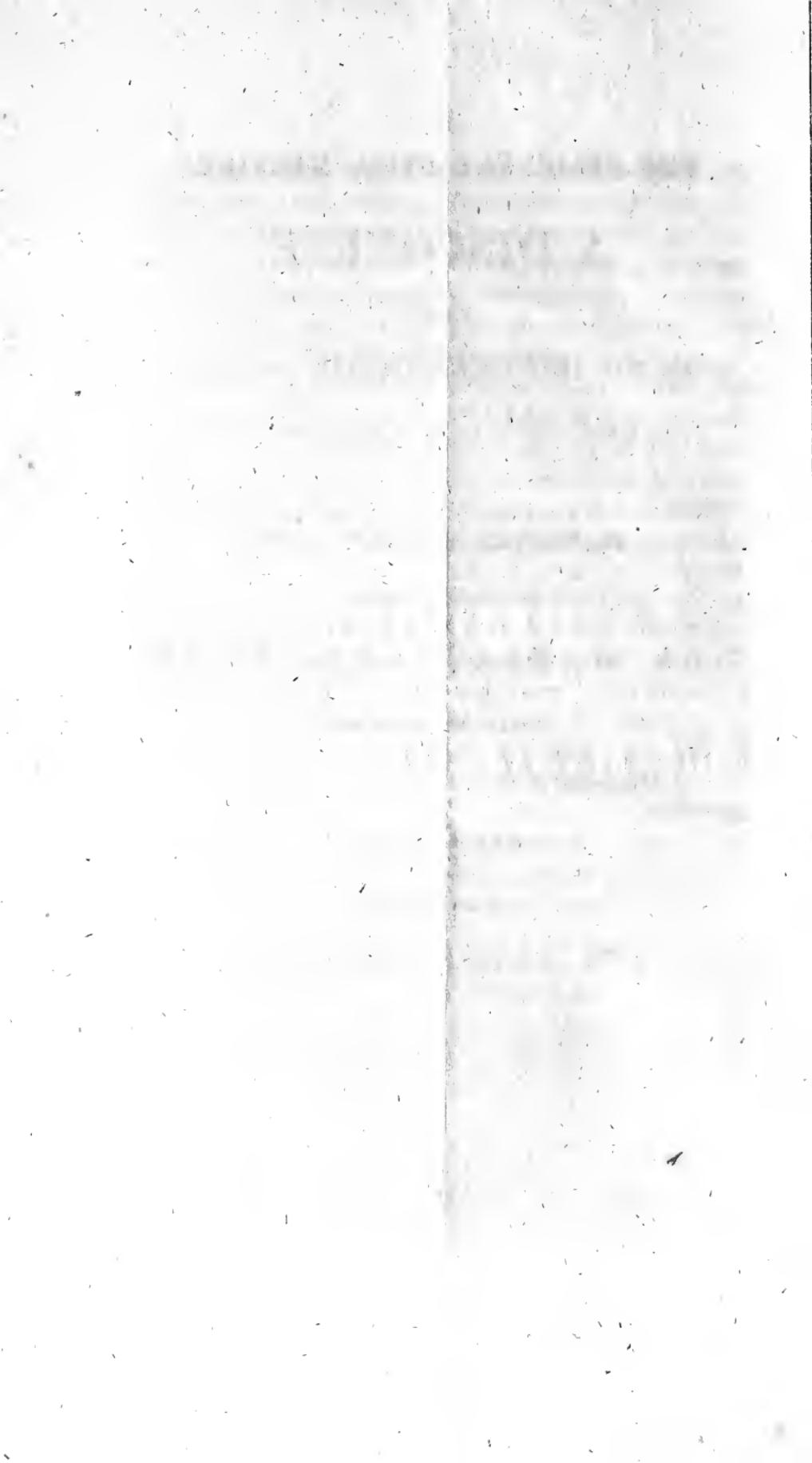


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A DISCOURSE
ON THE DEATH OF
MRS. MARIA WARD SMITH.



THE BELIEVER'S DYING MESSAGE: A DISCOURSE

DELIVERED

IN THE FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,

[AND REPEATED, BY REQUEST, IN THE BRICK PRESB. CHURCH,]

IN

ROCHESTER, N. Y. JULY 31, 1842,

ON THE DEATH OF

MRS. MARIA WARD SMITH,

[WIFE OF REV. ELI SMITH,]

WHO DIED AT BEYROOT, IN SYRIA,

MAY 27, 1842,

BY THE

REV. TRYON EDWARDS.

PRINTED FOR THE RELATIVES AND FRIENDS OF THE DECEASED.

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DISCOURSE.

Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.—Luke xxiii. 28.

No spectacle on earth is more sublime and touching, than that of self-forgetfulness or self-sacrifice for the good of others. Who has not admired the noble Roman, who, when a chasm was opened by an earthquake in the midst of the city, voluntarily plunged himself to its fathomless depths, if possibly, as the oracle had declared, it might thus be closed up? Who has not wept in childhood, if not in riper years, over the touching story of a Damon and a Pythias—each demanding that *he* might die for the other;—or over an Aristides or a Roger Williams, going in calmness to an unjust banishment, rather than longer distract their respective countries by remaining?

But of all the self-sacrifices—of all the self-forgetfulness for the sake of others that earth has ever witnessed, that which our Saviour displayed is the most touching and wonderful. In his whole career, from its commencement to its close—in his exchange of Heaven for earth for our sakes,—in his life of toil and suffering, and in his death of agony upon the cross,—in all he evinced the same spirit. And of all its exhibitions, few are more touching—more noble—more glorious than the one before us. He has just been unjustly condemned by the irresolute and popularity-seeking Pilate, and they are

leading him away, amid the scoffs and jeers of the multitude, to the horrible death of the cross. And as he is passing on to Calvary, a band of the people, and of women, melted, it would seem, by the mournfulness and the fearfulness of his end, bewail and lament him—weep over his sufferings, and his coming doom. They had known and had loved him—he had seemed to them the perfection of our race—blessing all to whom he had come. And touched with the stern cruelty and the injustice of his sentence, in sadness they weep over himself and his untimely fate. And the Saviour sees their tears, and forgetting his own sufferings and all that is before him, in the affecting language of our text, he exclaims, “Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me—not for my sufferings; but weep for yourselves and for your children.” Foreseeing, as though they were present realities, all the horrors—the coming desolations of Jerusalem, he knows there is reason for tears, and he tells them to weep for themselves and for their children, while weeping might avail for them—while they might yet be safe.

It hardly seems a forced use of the passage, to suppose it the expression of every dying Christian, to those whom they leave behind them on earth. Could we listen to the last accents of every such Christian, addressed to the friends around their dying beds—could we hear them in imagination speak to us from the coffin—from the silence of the sepulchre, or from the world of light, would they not seem to say in tones of earnest entreaty and tender admonition, “Weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children?” Dwelling for a few moments on this thought, let us notice, *first*, why it is that we have no good reason to weep for Christian friends who have gone before us to eternity, and *then* why we who are left behind have reason to weep for ourselves and for those who may be near and dear to us.

I. *We have no good reason to weep for Christian friends who have gone before us to eternity.* We do indeed weep,

and with reason weep around the beds of such,—but it is for our own sakes—because they are taken from us—because our sympathies are touched—because the dearest ties of earth are severed, and we are left in stifled or bursting grief to mourn over our own deep desolation of spirit. It is true, indeed, that there is a joy mingled with our grief—even so far as *we* are concerned; for when either the infant in its cherub loveliness, or the Christian friend of riper years, is taken from us, we feel with full assurance, that another of our jewels is laid up safely in Heaven—that God has taken it to his own casket. But still we weep—for in such an hour, as in every hour of inward desolation, there is a luxury and a relief in tears. But we do not weep—we do not *with reason* weep for the departed. And we do not, because,

1. *They are removed from the physical sufferings of earth.* These are inwoven with our being. With sin they took up their abode in the world, and only with sin will they leave it. Some, indeed, are comparatively free from their influence; but to the great mass of mankind, there are pains and sufferings in all the pathway of life. And if not before, then at the close of life they are upon us—sometimes, indeed, in comparative lightness—sometimes, perhaps, entirely prevented by sudden death—but often in deep and untold anguish.

It is true that most have far more hours of health than of sickness—and yet the hours of sickness and suffering—when the earth to us loses its brightness, and the flowers their beauty, and the world its interest, and life its joys—these hours are but too many to us all. From all these, however, death frees the Christian. It bears him from them all to that blessed world where the joyous pulsations of health beat in every vein, and pains and sickness are strangers, and the agonies of death are unknown forever. And with this prospect before him, well, as he is departing, may he say, “Weep not for me!”

Again, we have no reason to weep for Christian friends, torn from us by death, because

2. *They have gone from the sorrows and trials of life.* In youth, when every thing seems bright before us, we hardly believe that there *are* such trials ; and as we hear it from those older than ourselves, we regard all their monitions as very well meant, but as without foundation, or perhaps, as here and there the solitary cases of peculiar disappointment in life. But as we advance in years, we too soon find that this world is one of many sorrows and many trials.

Some of us may have visible sufferings upon which the world can gaze—and where those are absent, and every thing seems bright and prosperous to the world's eye, there may be secret and hidden sorrows, the keenness of which may be such, that compared with them, all visible trials and griefs seem but the bitter or childish mockery of the name. The heart, broken and bleeding in secret—the fierce but unseen struggle with temptation and the fall before it, with the subsequent self-reproach, and the gnawing sense of self-unworthiness, and of personal guilt—the untold injuries of others—the ingratitude and waywardness of those who are dear to our hearts—the blighting of cherished plans, and the darkening of faded prospects—the deep and utter desolation of spirit when friends are torn from us by death ; and the still deeper and darker desolation when the living to whom we were fondly attached, do but live on to shame themselves, and pierce our souls with many sorrows ; these are some of the elements of earth's bitterness, making it indeed to our spirits, a vale of tears. But in Heaven there are none of these sources of sorrow ; for there probation, and with it the discipline of our trial is forever at an end. To that world of freedom from sorrow and grief, our departed Christian friends have gone ; and as they are taking their final flight, well may they say to us, as they are passing to its joys, “Weep not for me !” Still further will it appear that we have no reason to weep for Christian friends who have left us, if we reflect,

3. *That they have gone from the temptations and the sins of*

earth. These, to the Christian, are after all, the sources of his keenest trials ; for often do they lead him to inconsistency, and send to his conscience the stings of grief and self-reproach and leave a stain of darkness upon his soul, and a sad record in the book of judgment : often by them does he dishonor the cause of his Redeemer, and treasure up for his serious hours, bitterness and anguish of spirit. The sufferings of earth are often painful, and so are its sorrows and trials ; more so, frequently, than tongue can tell. But ah ! the temptations and the sins of earth ! These it is that to the child of God, are the most trying and painful ; that often cause him in anguish to exclaim, " Oh ! wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death."

In Heaven, however, temptations shall have ceased, and sin shall no more pollute the spirit, or lead the followers of Jesus from his service, or shut out from them the smiles of God. Death ends their transgressions, their fears and temptations, and all their imperfections, whether of nature or of grace. They just cross the sea of Death, and Jesus is with them on the other side ; they pass the door of the sepulchre, and Christ is with them, face to face ; they lie down in the quiet sleep of the grave, and as they awake, it is to the full, and unclouded, and glorious vision of God. Friends may be weeping around their tombs, but they are striking their harps in Heaven ; for death to them, like the whirlwind to the prophet, has but blown off their mantle of flesh, while it wafts their spirits, as in chariots of fire, to Heaven. Darkness they have exchanged for light ; partial sanctification for perfect holiness ; earthly weakness for immortal strength ; agitating storms for unclouded calmness ; the fellowship of earth for that of Heaven ; the perils of warfare, for the honors and crowns of victory—victory eternal.

Passing, then, as they are to all this, even though death be the way to it, well may they say to us, each as they pass from our sight, " Weep not for me !"

No reason have they to weep for themselves ; for they go from a vale of tears—from a world of sin, to one of endless joy and holiness—to the very bosom of God. Angels do not weep over them—rather do they hail them in triumph ascending to *their* abodes ; to their eternal fellowship. Christ does not weep over them, for precious in his sight is the death of his saints, and with joy does he take them to the mansions of his Father's house, there to dwell forever ! Why, then, should we mourn for them ; for their sakes ? Why not rather heed their parting monition, as from the spirit land, they remind us that they are happy now ; each exclaiming in tones of consolation to us, “Weep not for me !”

But there is another charge that sounds to us from these departing ones. While they say to us, each as they pass to a brighter world, “Weep not for me,” they add in touching and in monitory tones, “weep for yourselves and for your children.” Though we have no reason to weep for the Christian friends who have left us, we have

II. *Much reason to weep for ourselves, and for those who with us still remain on earth.* Every reason which might prompt departing saints to urge us to dry our tears for them, might also warn us to let them flow for ourselves, and for our friends about us. *They* are going from all the physical sufferings of earth ; but with these sufferings *we* are still surrounded. *They* are passing from all the trials and sorrows of time ; but these sorrows and trials must still be *ours*. Temptation and sin—these *they* are leaving forever ; but to these *we* must still be exposed, and perhaps they are yet to wring or rend our spirits with an anguish and a grief, compared with which the very agonies of death are less than a passing pang.

Well, then, may the departing, as they pass us on their way to glory, echo even to the *Christian*, as they pass, “Weep—weep for yourselves.” And if to those who by God’s grace are his ; if to *those* they may give such a parting charge,

how much more to those who are without hope and without God in the world ; who are passing on through all the hazards and dangers of time, to all the ruin of an undone eternity ! Ye who are unprepared for death ; weeping as you may be over the lifeless remains of some one dear to your hearts ; hark ! and from those lips now closed in death, you may almost hear, through the distance, as from the stillness of eternity, the solemn charge from the departed, " Weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, for your children, for your friends, who like you, are unprepared to follow me. Weep for the ruinous abuse you are making of your noble powers, and boundless privileges under the light of the gospel. Weep for your ingratitude to your God ; for your neglect of his wondrous love ; for your rejection of his offered mercy. Weep for your perverted time and talents and influence ; for your wasted and wasting probation ; for your many and aggravated sins, and the wrath that must follow them ; for the coming desolation of your hopes ; for the gathering ruin of all your prospects ; for the truth you have disregarded, and the obligations you have violated ; for the despair that must be yours on the bed of death ; for the fearful future that will then be before you ; for the judgment with its endless retrIBUTions, when you will be separated from us forever. Weep ; for angels might well weep over you, as the Saviour wept over the devoted city. Weep ; for you will soon begin your eternal weeping, that you have wasted your probation, that you have ruined your own soul ; that your harvest is forever past, and for you there is no more hope. Weep for yourselves, before it shall be too late for tears. Weep for your friends in impenitence, before they shall be hardened and reprobate, and you and they together perish. or all these things weep, and let your tears affect your hearts, and your hearts be melted into penitence ; for if you fail to do it, soon will woes be upon you, compared with which those of ancient Jerusalem would be less than nothing."

Such, my hearers, is the monition of the text ; uttered originally from the Saviour's lips ; repeated in its spirit by every departing Christian ; and now, as we may with full reason imagine, borne to us from "the land which the patriarchs trod—where the bones of the prophets are laid"—echoed to us from one who but recently has gone from among us to that land, and from that land to eternity.

MRS. MARIA WARD SMITH was born in this city in May 31, 1819 ; was hopefully converted, and united on profession of her faith, with this church, July 3, 1836 ; was married to the Rev. Eli Smith, of the Syrian Mission, March 9, 1841 ; and on the 27th of April following, sailed with her husband to her newly adopted home, Beyroot, in Syria, where she died on the 27th of May, 1842. It seems but yesterday since she was with us ; since in these aisles she stood, here to take the vows of God upon her ; since she mingled with us in the social circle, and the Sabbath School, and the place of prayer, and the house of God ; since, with a strange mingling of joy and sadness we stood beside her in the home of her childhood, as she assumed one of the most hallowed and tender relations of earth ; since there we gave her the farewell word, and pressed for her the parting hand, and commended her in deep and heart-felt tenderness to the God of her fathers, and of missions. It seems but yesterday since all this was reality ; since the sadness of the parting hour, and the dim foreboding that to some might have shadowed the future, were lighted up with the hope that she might long be spared to be useful—perhaps again to meet with us on earth. But now, as in a moment—in the very midst of festivities, such as those in which we parted from her, undimmed, however, by the sadness that then was with us—in the very midst of these festivities, come to us the tidings of her death—that she has gone from us forever ! And with deep thankfulness do we rejoice that with those sad tidings, we may also hear her voice sounding to us from that distant land, "Weep not for me !" With

full reason do we trust that she might say this ; not from her morality, though this was spotless ; not from her loveliness and excellence, though these were unusual, and left their impress upon every heart ; but because her hopes were rested on the Rock of Ages—on the Redeemer of sinners.

Long before his coming, death often stamps with the deepest loveliness, those who are earliest marked for himself ; just as with the autumn leaves, he sends the brightest hues to those that are first to die. And so it seemed to be with her who has left us ; that she had manifestly been ripening—preparing for Heaven before she was called to depart. By nature she possessed a mind of more than ordinary strength, proportion and clearness. She had enjoyed the highest advantages of education, and faithfully improved by them all. Her intellect was cultivated rather than brilliant, and sound and sure rather than rapid in its movements. She was eager in her desire for knowledge ; patient and persevering in its acquisition ; judicious and practical in its use. Her judgment was highly cultivated : she was clear in conception, and if not rapid, yet always sensible in thought. Marked by unusual amiableness and cheerfulness, she was justly a favorite with all who knew her. In all her relations, as a daughter, sister, friend, associate, she was faithful and approved of all.

But though she had much to attract, to bind her to this world, yet from the time of her conversion, her chief thoughts and affections were given to another, and a better, and to duty here in preparation for it. As a Christian, she was consistent, exemplary, serious ; sometimes despondent, but ever conscientious, and still striving to be faithful. She highly prized the Bible, and the various means of grace. In them she earnestly sought “the sincere milk of the word,” and she evidently “grew thereby.” Never have I known her absent from the sanctuary on the Sabbath, from the prayer meeting or from her class in the Sabbath School, except when detained by illness, or the manifest providence of God. In religion,

as in other things, her course was not one of fitfulness or impulse, but of steady, onward progress ; not one, now of vivid gleams of light, and now of corresponding darkness, but of steadily increasing light, “shining brighter and brighter to the perfect day.” She exemplified religion in the family—in every-day life, and in little things ; and many whom she has taught in the Sabbath School, to whom she has borne the tract with its printed message of mercy, and to whom in kindness and earnestness she has spoken of their soul’s salvation, are the living witnesses of her faithfulness as a follower of Christ.

At an early period in her Christian course, she began to feel a deep interest in the subject of missions to the heathen. For obvious reasons, she rarely, if ever, spoke of this interest to others ; and even in her own mind, it had thus far no definite object or aim. And yet, as if nurtured by that Providence that was guiding *her* path, it gradually increased and strengthened, until in her union with Mr. Smith, it found its proper field of action in a foreign land. Unconsciously to herself, but most evidently to all around her, she had long been maturing for some high sphere of usefulness, and now as the call from her master comes, she is ready to depart and enter it. But few, in going to the missionary work, are called to sacrifices great as were hers ; sacrifices most trying to all the sensibilities of our nature. She was the eldest of a circle of beloved brothers and sisters—the favorite of her numerous relatives and friends ; and in every respect her home was most attractive to a mind and a heart like hers. But still she could leave all at her Saviour’s bidding ; and go with composed, and not uncheerful spirit, from the home of her childhood and her dearest earthly friends, to engage in the cause which had enlisted her holiest affections, and to which she had now devoted her life.

She sailed, as already remarked, in April, 1841, and arrived in Syria in the June following. Not quite a year had she been on the foreign field, where she was beloved by

all, and had already entered upon her active duties as a missionary, when she was called to the bed of sickness—to the bed of death. But a few short weeks before her departure, she was in almost perfect health, and soon was permitted to rejoice in perhaps the most tender and hallowed feelings of earth—those of one for the first time a mother. “At this time,” says her husband, “we were perfectly happy.” But alas! how uncertain and fleeting is the happiness of earth! In two days she was taken with fever and inflammation, leading on to alarming results; and under these, notwithstanding every effort and attention that skill and affection could suggest, she gradually grew worse for some days, until, on the 27th of May, she quietly sunk to her rest—“ceasing to breathe,” says Dr. De Forest, “in a manner so gradual, and with a smile so spread over her whole countenance, that we could not but thank God for her peaceful end.”

When first informed that there was no hope of her recovery, she was somewhat agitated. In a moment, however, she fully recovered herself, and calmly sent her dying messages of affection to her family and friends—charging them to live for God, and in constant preparation for death. Then turning her thoughts to herself, at *first* she did not find that full assurance that she said she had supposed God gave to all his people, and which *she* had expected in the hour of death. Before her departure, however, she found it, to the full. For on being afterward asked, “If the Saviour was with her, and if she felt that she was supported by him,” her face was lighted up with an almost angelic smile, and she attempted to utter the word “glorious”—thus showing that she had found light in the “dark valley of the shadow of death.”

Just before her death, came a letter from this country, reminding her that “she had solemnly promised to write and inform its writer, whether, after being six months in Syria, she could conscientiously say that she continued to rejoice in the step that she had taken—that she was fully assured

she had done what was right and best and for her individual happiness, and had never regretted the sacrifice she had made in giving up friends and home and country for the cause of Christ." This message arrived too late to be communicated to herself; for it came when she was thought to be dying. But as if providentially to answer it, when soon afterward her husband was about leaving her for a little while that she might rest, she called him back "to say one thing before she forgot it, and while she had strength;" and that was "that she had never regretted, but always rejoiced that she had gone as a missionary to Syria." This was said without its being called for or suggested by any inquiry or allusion to the subject. It was a remark *volunteered* when she thought she had but a few hours to live. Being asked soon afterward "if she found comfort in trusting her Redeemer," a "smile spread over her entire features, and gave them—all pale and bloodless as they were, the aspect of unearthly joy." "I have never," says Dr. De Forest, "seen a death-bed, in all my six years of watching them, where there was such perfect peace, and such calm bliss, as was manifest in that peculiar smile. Nor have I ever seen, in the highest joys of health, or amid the scenes of earthly festivity, an expression of such entire and perfect satisfaction, as beamed upon the countenance of our dying friend."

Thus she continued, now asking that the promises might be repeated or read to guide her thoughts—now almost insensible, and now reviving again—conscious of what was going on around her, though already holding communion with the world of spirits—"the pains of death actually passed"—till the morning of the 27th, when without a struggle or a groan she quietly sunk to her rest, like an infant to its sleep, with her hand under her cheek, till her spirit took its flight, leaving still that sweet smile upon her lips, to speak of the joy to which she had gone in heaven!

Day by day, and hour by hour did she languish and gra-

dually decline, fading at last, like one of the sweet flowers we remember and love in our childhood, with gradual and yet perceptible progress to the grave—not blasted at once, like the blossom torn from the bough, or the flower that is crushed by a stroke, but slowly, calmly, gently, as the fading of the leaf before the quiet but ceaseless march of time. She passed away, not as the light which is quenched in a moment, but rather faded “as fades the morning star, that goes not down, but melts away into the light of heaven.” Eleven short months, and the conflict was over, the victory was soon attained, the crown but too soon won!

Her orphan babe, never to know a mother’s love and care, was baptized at her funeral, and named after her two brothers, of whose hopeful conversion, and of the revival in which it took place, she heard with inexpressible joy almost in her departing moments; and in view of which she was ready to say with Simeon of old, “Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.” Addresses were made at the funeral, both in Arabic and English, and the large court of the mission house was filled with sympathizing friends, both natives and missionaries. A hymn was sung at the house, and another at the grave, while almost every eye was filled with tears. She sleeps in the mission burying-ground, by the side of Mrs. Hebard, and Mrs. Wolcott. A fig tree marks the spot, and near it is the cypress that waves over the grave of the devoted and lamented Fisk. Away from her native land, severed from parents and brothers and sisters and friends, torn from the tenderest of all earthly relations, and from the new and hallowed ties that were just binding her afresh to life, still she could feel that all was well, and without a murmur say, “Not my will, but thine be done.”

And now as she passes forever from us—as she sinks to the rest of her narrow bed, methinks we may hear her well remembered voice, saying in serious, and tender, and monitory tones, “Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep

for yourselves, and your children.” “ Weep not for me, for I am happy now, and safe forever. A crown of life, and a harp of joy, and a song of praise are mine; and God is mine, and heaven is mine. But weep for yourselves. Weep, ye who are *Christians*, that you are no better prepared to follow where I have gone; and that you are doing no more for your own souls, for the salvation of others, for the cause and glory of your Redeemer. And ye who are *impenitent*, weep that you are not God’s friends; that you are unprepared for heaven; that if you are called away in your sins, I shall meet you no more—dwell with you no more forever. Weep that you have so long abused God’s mercies; that you have so long rejected his grace. Weep that your probation is passing away, and that you are misimproving and wasting it all, only that it may rise up at last and testify against you. Weep that soon your harvest will be past, your summer ended, your soul forever unsaved! For these things weep in solitude and sadness; in the closet, and under the eye of God, weep, and mourn for your sins, and fly to the cross of Christ, that your tears may be wiped away, and that yours may be that inheritance where tears and sorrow and death shall never come.”

These, my hearers—especially the companions and friends of the departed—the youth also of this congregation—these are the monitions that sound to you from yonder distant grave—from where that cypress waves—from the world of spirits. Hearken to them! candidates for immortality; for you too are hastening to the tomb, and soon shall your hour come. Hearken to them! and yours shall be the death of the righteous, yours his harp, his crown, his immortality of bliss. Obey them; and *you* shall be able in death to say, “ Weep not for me!” and soon all tears shall be wiped forever from your eyes. Reject them, and soon you shall forever weep your own folly, your endless ruin!

